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The Future of NATO and Enlargement

Thomas S. Szayna

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Committee on International Relations, United States
House of Representatives on April 17, 2002*

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1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
201 North Craig Street, Suite 102, Pittsburgh, PA 15213
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Testimony of Thomas S. Szayna
Political Scientist, RAND
Before the Subcommittee on Europe
of the Committee on International Relations
United States House of Representatives

April 17, 2002

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for inviting me to testify on the military preparations and readiness of the candidate countries to join NATO.¹ In June 2001, NATO heads of state agreed to invite at least one country to join the alliance at its summit meeting in November 2002 in Prague. Officials from many countries in and near Europe have expressed their goal to join NATO, but the set of realistic candidates from which the invitees will be chosen in November 2002 is comprised of the nine countries currently in NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP).²

In today's statement, I focus on assessing the preparations the MAP countries are making to attain standards that would allow them to function effectively within NATO and on assessing their likely military contributions to the alliance. First, I outline the goals that NATO has set for the candidates. Second, I discuss some of the constraints that limit the ability of the MAP states to reach these goals. Third, I briefly go over the basic contributions to the alliance that the

¹This statement is based on a variety of sources, including research conducted by the author during the last five years on the reform of the armed forces of the European post-communist countries as part of RAND's Project Air Force, RAND's federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) for the United States Air Force. The specific project that this testimony builds on was sponsored by the Commander, United States Air Forces in Europe, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations, Headquarters, United States Air Force. That said, however, the opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research.

²The nine countries include the following: Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

candidates can make. Fourth, I discuss some recommendations for an optimal U.S. approach to shaping the militaries of the candidate countries. I want to stress that the testimony is focused on the military aspects of enlargement rather than the political rationale behind it.

WHAT GOALS HAS NATO SET FOR THE CANDIDATES?

NATO launched MAP in April 1999, with the aim of keeping the alliance's door open to future members. MAP consists of individually tailored programs of activities and exchanges to help the aspirant countries prepare for possible membership. MAP contains five "chapters:" (1) political and economic issues; (2) defense/military issues; (3) resource issues; (4) security issues; and (5) legal issues. Each MAP country prepares a detailed annual plan as part of MAP, with activities designed to further alliance compatibility in all five chapters. The MAP mechanism complemented an existing program of cooperation between the candidate states and NATO under the auspices of NATO's Partnership for Peace (or PfP) Planning and Review Process (or PARP). In its current form, PARP resembles the alliance's Defense Planning Questionnaire (the DPQ) and consists of a series of goals for interoperability and for forces and capabilities. Additional bilateral mechanisms of cooperation between the candidates and the major NATO countries serve to provide further guidance.

Although a variety of mechanisms to improve the compatibility of the candidate forces with NATO is in place, the alliance has always emphasized that none of the goals in MAP or any other programs of cooperation should be considered as a list of criteria for membership. As NATO has stressed, invitations to join the alliance will be based strictly on a consensus alliance decision that bringing the given state into the alliance will contribute to security in Europe. In other words, strategic motivations, rather than any specific criteria, military or not, will guide NATO choices. In this sense, whether the candidate states attain MAP and PARP goals is

useful, but it does not determine whether an invitation will be issued. It is important to remember that preparations and even readiness for membership say nothing about the strategic wisdom of inviting a given state to be a member. The above notwithstanding, if a candidate state cannot fulfill the criteria in MAP and PARP, then that state is not likely to contribute much to NATO or be able to participate fully in the alliance's activities.

Within the outlines of the five MAP chapter headings, candidates are expected to take action on dozens of specific areas to achieve agreement with alliance norms and customs. Other than Macedonia and Albania, the candidates have made progress in meeting the stipulations of the political and economic chapter of MAP. Bulgaria and Romania still need to consolidate that progress. There is the potential for backsliding in Slovakia, if the populists who governed prior to 1998 come back to power. The legal chapter is uncontroversial, and none of the candidates would have problems with it prior to accession. The security chapter may be more difficult to implement, although it also should be uncontroversial. The actual determinants about which countries will need to enact special procedures for safeguarding sensitive information may come after the issuing of invitations.

The most challenging aspects that the candidates face are in the military realm. The candidates are expected to: (1) provide forces and capabilities for NATO missions; (2) participate in NATO's military structure, agencies, and planning; and (3) pursue standardization and interoperability. Achieving the above entails having the political capacity and will to be active NATO members and devoting enough resources to these efforts (which, in itself, entails having the appropriate defense resource planning mechanisms in place).

WHAT CONSTRAINTS DO THE CANDIDATES FACE?

A fundamental constraint on the ability of the MAP states to achieve the military objectives is the lack of resources available to them relative to most of the current NATO members. In itself, this stems from the small size and relative lack of affluence of the candidate states. With one exception (Romania), most of the MAP states have populations of less than 8 million and, of these, other than Bulgaria and Slovakia, all have populations smaller than 4 million. The MAP countries can be categorized here into three groups along the lines of affluence (measured by GDP per capita) and, thus, potential to devote resources to NATO integration. Albania and Macedonia fall substantially below the levels of affluence of the least affluent NATO member, Turkey. Bulgaria and Romania are close to the Turkish level of affluence. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, and Slovenia are at a higher level of affluence than Turkey and either close to, or at the level of, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

The starting point for the transformations of the MAP states' defense establishments differs and continues to influence their adaptation to NATO. Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia inherited a large military establishment from the communist era. The other MAP states basically had to start from scratch, having little in terms of equipment and organization.³ As such, their problems have been different. Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia have faced problems of military reform similar to those faced by Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, namely, cutting back force size and force structure and gradually making equipment compatible with that within NATO. The problem here has been how to slim down and adapt the legacy forces. The other MAP countries have had the opposite problem of how to build up a NATO-compatible military

³Albania is a hybrid case, in that it inherited large forces from the communist era but then allowed them to fall into disarray.

establishment. Different levels of resource availability and varying degrees of effectiveness in defense planning have led to different levels of success in this group.

Touching on the resource chapter of MAP, the willingness of the candidates to invest resources in defense has varied, although all the MAP states have plans in place to increase their defense spending to close to 2.0 percent of the GDP (with some of them at that level already). Whether the candidates will stick to those plans once they are members is debatable. The defense burden-sharing issues aside, there remains the fundamental point of low resources in an absolute sense. The combined current level of annual defense expenditures by all nine MAP states is approximately \$2 billion (which is two-thirds of what current less affluent or small NATO allies like Poland or Denmark, respectively, spend annually).

WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS CAN THE CANDIDATES MAKE TO NATO?

As a basic assessment, none of the MAP states can offer any forces and capabilities that would be unique to the alliance, although they can augment NATO's forces in some areas. Neither in quality nor quantity will the MAP states, collectively or individually, make a substantive difference in NATO's military potential. Their accession to NATO in the near-term would make the problem of interoperability and compatibility among the alliance's forces more acute, since it will enlarge the group of NATO countries within NATO that cannot meet the high levels of combat potential of the United States and a few other major allies.

The ground forces of the MAP countries can fulfill NATO's mission of providing a (limited) deterrent and an initial defense of their borders. However, only small portions of these ground forces can participate effectively in NATO's power-projection missions. The vast majority of the ground forces of the MAP militaries have obsolete equipment, training and readiness that falls short of general alliance norms, and deployment capabilities that are

unsuitable outside their countries. Only Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania possess heavy forces, and these suffer from the same problems common to the rest of the armed forces. That said, some of the light forces of the MAP countries are suitable for peacekeeping operations, and almost all the MAP countries have had contingents participate in NATO's peace operations in the Balkans. The support elements in the MAP forces (engineer, medical, military police) can make an especially useful contribution to NATO's peace operations. Several MAP countries also have special forces (commando/ranger) units and certain types of forces, such as mountain infantry (Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria), that could be an asset in some NATO combat operations. In addition, portions of the rapid-reaction forces being set up in all the MAP states also have utility to NATO, subject to constraints stemming from equipment, logistical issues, and lack of organic transport.

In terms of air forces, the MAP countries can provide for surveillance of their own airspace. However, other than Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia, they have little or no means of protecting their airspace. None of the MAP countries can contribute air force contingents for NATO power-projection missions. The naval forces of MAP countries (except for the landlocked Slovakia and Macedonia, all the MAP states have small navies) are oriented toward coast defense. Problems of obsolete equipment, low training, and readiness have affected the air and naval forces to a greater extent than the ground forces.

Probably the most important contribution that the MAP states can make to NATO is their ability to provide airspace and quality infrastructure for supporting NATO deployment and training. The post-September 11th security environment has elevated the importance of the sea and air bases in Bulgaria and Romania.

The resource and human constraints in MAP states limit their ability to participate effectively in NATO's military structure, agencies, and planning. Assuming that every NATO candidate country will need to appoint approximately 200 officers and defense civilians (who are fluent in English) annually to the variety of NATO headquarters and agencies, none of the MAP states can fulfill that goal in the near future without repercussions for the functioning of their ministries of defense. The Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, despite having much greater resources than any MAP country, have had difficulties fulfilling their NATO staffing requirements. The MAP states will face much more severe problems.

In terms of attaining compatibility with NATO forces, the important question here is the extent of interoperability required and the time frame available in which to work out at least temporary solutions. Focusing on selective units (primarily rapid-reaction and/or specialized troops), continued investments in interoperability—along with making some tough choices—will allow for some of the best units of the forces of MAP states to be integrated in certain NATO operations. Anything beyond that is a long-term goal.

If the above picture seems overly negative, it is important to keep in mind that the standard of reference is very high. NATO militaries are among the best and most technologically advanced in the world. In any event, with wise investments and good planning that stresses the comparative advantages of the militaries of the MAP states, the candidates can become net contributors to NATO in the long-term. In the near-term, because of the human and resource constraints, the MAP states would have difficulties in functioning effectively in the alliance.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO MAKE THE CANDIDATES NET CONTRIBUTORS?

Whether a MAP state is invited to join NATO this year or not, there is a long-term U.S. interest in assisting these militaries in being able to participate in NATO operations. The interactions and guidance that are part of MAP and PARP, combined with the desire of the MAP states to join NATO, have meant that incentives were in place for the MAP states to devote a fair share of resources to defense, to make some hard choices in defense planning, and to make their defense planning programs compatible with those of NATO. Both NATO and the candidates have gained as a result. However, those incentives will largely disappear upon accession to NATO.

The MAP states can contribute relatively more to NATO if, instead of building up their forces across the board, they would keep in mind the law of comparative advantage, build on existing strengths, and focus on the prospective missions their armed forces might undertake. With a well thought-out plan of development and modernization, and increased operations and maintenance spending, the armed forces of the MAP states eventually could make a meaningful, albeit small (i.e., proportional to their size), contribution to the alliance. MAP has helped to guide them in that direction. However, if the incentives of potential membership were to disappear, then country choices are likely to yield a less efficient use of resources, driven by any number of factors, ranging from prestige to incompletely developed defense planning and procurement processes.

A potential way to keep the incentive system in place and still achieve the political goals of inviting the MAP states to join the alliance is to delay actual membership until the existing MAP goals are completely fulfilled. In this sense, membership would be contingent on the MAP state being able to function in the alliance and make a military contribution to NATO.

Otherwise, near-term accession to the alliance may require additional assistance from the current NATO members to make the candidate countries' membership substantive as opposed to nominal and/or adjustments in NATO's expectations from individual members. From a long-term perspective, the approach has merit in that it will provide a constructive framework for maximizing the military contributions of the candidates while providing the near-term security "umbrella" that the MAP states desire and preventing disruptions to the functioning of the alliance.

With that, I conclude my testimony. I welcome any questions you may have.